

Improving Teaching and Learning for Adults with Basic Skill Needs through Formative Assessment - The Danish Background Report

The Danish Background Report prepared for the Danish Ministry of Education as an input to the OECD study “Improving Teaching and Learning for Adults with Basic Skill Needs through Formative Assessment”. The document was prepared in response to guidelines the OECD provided to all participating countries. The opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the national authority, the OECD, or the governments of its member countries.

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1 Introduction

The Danish Ministry of Education has asked the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) to coordinate the Danish contribution to the OECD project “Improving Teaching and Learning for Adults with Basic Skill Needs through Formative Assessment” and to prepare a national background report. The country background report is complemented by a case study, which is included in the annexes of the main OECD report (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/172034035238>). Thus, the national background report represents a part of the knowledge basis for the related case studies.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the Danish background report is to develop a better understanding of the ways in which policy, research, and practice may address challenges in adult basic skills education in Denmark. The report specifically aims to describe the framework and conditions for basic adult education, with a special view to formative assessment, exploring the following themes:

- Nature and scale of challenges facing countries in regard to adult basic skills education.
- Major programmes and policies developed to meet the needs of adults with low basic skill needs.
- Profiles of instructors.
- Gaps in provision and take-up.
- Assessment policies/structures.
- Formative assessment.

As the reader will note, this report contains very little on the subject of formative assessment. The reason is that, so far, very little documentation is available on this subject. On the other hand, the report brings together available knowledge about educational programmes where formative assessment may take place and, as such, constitutes a basis for the subsequent case studies analysing the practice formative assessment within exemplary programmes of the adult basic skills sector in Denmark.

For the purpose of this report, “adult basic skills education” is defined as basic education of adults in reading, writing and mathematics. This definition does not imply any stance in terms of whether some qualifications are more important than others.

Although this report has a special focus on formative assessment, we have chosen to translate the widespread Danish concept “løbende evaluering” as “continuing evaluation” because we find this closer to the Danish understanding. In the Danish context, the concept “evaluation” embraces more than the concept “assessment” in the sense that it includes a value judgement. The word “continuing” refers to the frequency while “formative” also covers the sense of interaction and adjustment of the process of learning.

1.2 The organisation of the project

At the beginning of January 2006, EVA was contacted by the Danish Ministry of Education regarding coordination of the following tasks:

- preparation of a national background report;
- recruitment of a national expert to share the joint responsibility for the case studies with an OECD-appointed expert;
- selection of educational programmes for the case study and to be carried out in co-operation with the Ministry of Education;
- planning, participation in and implementation of site visits;
- communication and coordination vis-à-vis the OECD, the Ministry of Education, the experts and the participating institutions etc.

On behalf of EVA, chief adviser Michael Andersen has been in charge of the project and the tasks outlined above. The background report was written in March-June 2006 and the visits, on which the case studies are based, were conducted in April-June 2006.

1.3 The report

The chapters of the report deal with the themes listed under the purpose (see above). The report will make running references to surveys, legislation, evaluation reports and other documentation (see references) but does not include a review of educational and other research within the field of study.

2 Challenges

In Denmark, early school leavers are defined as individuals without any education beyond the ninth or tenth grade of the Danish Folkeskole (primary and lower secondary school). Sixteen per cent of Danish adults between the ages of 20 and 64 are in this category. Since an increasingly large number of students complete some form of upper secondary education, the number of early school leavers is decreasing proportionally. Thus, only 10% of adults aged 20-23 are categorised as early school leavers¹.

On average the life pay of early school leavers is 15% lower than for groups with more education, and this group is at greater risk of ending up in a marginal position in the labour market. This risk is greater for women and for immigrant learners. In total, 33% of early school leavers do not participate in the labour market. While 24.5% of male early school leavers do not participate in the labour market, there are 41% of female early school leavers in this same category².

Compared with other groups, early school leavers have the lowest average level of literacy. Almost a third of early school leavers have poorer reading, writing and mathematics skills. At the same time, commitments in their working and/or private lives prevent them from earning such qualifications: 24% of early school leavers, thus, never learn to read, write or do sums in connection with their work, and a corresponding number rarely use such skills at work. Young early school leavers, however, have relatively better literacy skills than their older counterparts³.

The 2005 National Qualifications Survey concludes that the group of early school leavers is complex and that the qualifications profile of the group covers a wide spectrum. However, the group of early school leavers, as such, is the least qualified group in the labour market and in civilian life. As a consequence, more early school leavers risk marginalisation. In this regard, literacy plays an all-important role which may be summed up as follows: the higher a person's level of literacy, the greater that person's general qualifications level will be. Literacy, however, is not exclusively a matter of basic reading skills, the ability to do sums, and linguistic proficiency. It is also a matter of having a job that challenges such qualifications. Just under half of the early school leavers neither read nor write in connection with their job, and the incentive to develop such skills is correspondingly modest⁴. If we are to strengthen the qualifi-

¹ *The National Qualifications Survey, 2005, chapter 18: "Early school leavers", p. 235*

² *The National Qualifications Survey, 2005, chapter 18: "Early school leavers", p. 235*

³ *The National Qualifications Survey, 2005, chapter 18: "Early school leavers", p. 239*

⁴ *The National Qualifications Survey, 2005, chapter 18: "Early school leavers", p. 257*

cations of early school leavers, we need to look into the matter of both supplementary training in general and the learning possibilities provided on the job.

From the end of 2004 through early 2006, a so-called tripartite committee, consisting of representatives of the Danish government and the parties of the labour market (both labour and business leaders), were engaged in mapping and analysing the overall provision of adult education in Denmark with a view to the challenges of the future. The work of the committee has involved both vocational and general adult education with a special focus on groups of working adults with a low qualifications level.

The tripartite committee emphasises *challenges*⁵ related to strengthening and qualifying of demand of adult learning as well as strengthening and target-orienting the provision for adults with weak qualifications:

Challenges in terms of clarifying the needs of learners and enterprises, and of strengthening adult learning are:

- Increasing the motivation and the demand for public or private adult education and supplementary education and training (VEU), especially for: certain unskilled persons, individuals with weak/narrow qualifications, individuals with low literacy levels and immigrants with difficulties in the Danish language.
- Stimulating public and private enterprises to develop more systematic attention to qualifications and to create “learning workplaces”.
- Promoting the interaction between business enterprises and public VEU providers for the purpose of supporting the development of qualifications for businesses and employees.
- Providing individuals with better opportunities for professional, personal and career development.
- Describing and making visible the actual qualifications of the employees with a view to supporting mobility, developing the internal learning environments of the business organisations and promoting a target-oriented and efficient effort.
- Target-orienting and qualifying the demand with a view to strengthening the general effect of VEU initiatives.

Challenges in terms of strengthening the provision of adult learning:

- Targeting and reinforcing the provision of public VEU, especially aimed at strengthening the qualifications of unskilled persons, of individuals with weak/narrow qualifications, of individuals with low literacy levels and of individuals with Danish as a second language.
- Ensuring the provision of courses and programmes that enable everyone to raise their qualifications to a new formal level – especially for persons without any vocational qualifications.
- Making part of public provision of education and training – especially programmes aimed at certain unskilled persons, at individuals with weak/narrow qualifications, and individuals with low literacy levels – more relevant and flexible in relation to the working situation of the individual and the needs of the business enterprises.

⁵ *Tripartite committee 2006, p. 20*

- Endeavouring to organise programmes in a more target-oriented and flexible manner to ensure better interaction with and supplementing of learning that takes place in the workplace.

3 Programmes and policies

This chapter briefly outlines the educational programmes in Denmark that are available for adults with weak basic qualifications with special attention to Danish, reading, writing and mathematics.

The first part briefly introduces adult education centres (VUCs) in Denmark, which account for the greater part of basic adult education and the two types of education and training provided by the VUCs for this target group in terms of respectively preparatory adult education (FVU), and general adult education (AVU). The second part of this section focuses on the available programmes for Danish reading and writing, and the third part focuses on mathematics.

3.1 FVU and AVU programmes provided by adult education centres

In Denmark, there are a total of 29 adult education centres (VUCs) with a total of 65 departments. The adult education centres provide preparatory adult education (FVU), corresponding to levels below that of the end of compulsory school, general adult education (AVU), corresponding to the level at the end of basic school, single-subject higher preparatory courses (upper-secondary education for adults) supplementary examination courses at upper secondary level (GSK) and special education for dyslectics. Table 3 below provides an overview of the range of educational programmes catering to the group of adults with weak qualifications⁶.

3.1.1 FVU

All adults over the age of 18 may participate in the courses free of charge. FVU is primarily provided by adult education centres (VUC) and adult education associations, but it is also provided by other educational institutions catering to adults. The teaching activities may take place at business enterprises, in associations and at the relevant educational centre. FVU includes Reading and Mathematics (see below).

FVU is organised as classroom-based teaching, or as flexible teaching and may involve participants at several levels. The tuition is organised jointly by teachers and so that it is based on the participants' experience and fields of interest, including choice of topics and educational material. The tuition must uncover the learner's progression. This enables participants to choose and use the best suited strategies and working methods. Finally, tuition must be organised with a view to encouraging the participants to continue learning outside classes.

⁶ *Tripartite committee 2006, s. 94 og 101*

Table 1 shows the number of participants in FVU Reading and FVU Mathematics in the academic years 2003/2004 and 2004/2005.

Table 1
Number of participants in FVU Reading and FVU Mathematics

	2003/2004	2004/2005
FVU Reading	16 816	17 926
FVU Mathematic	3 801	4 211
Total	20 617	22 137

Source: Danmarks Statistik

3.1.2 AVU

AVU aims to provide adults with basic level skills. That means that the participants must “achieve general qualifications for continuing education”, and achieve “general knowledge and skills relevant to working life”. Their “qualifications for active participation in a democratic society and for understanding and influencing their own situation in life” must be strengthened⁷. Participants in AVU courses are allowed to choose as many courses they wish, since all are organised as stand-alone courses. At the AVU level, courses in the core subjects of Danish language, mathematics, English, German or French, social studies and science subjects are offered once a year, at a minimum. In addition, a number of non-compulsory subjects are offered. These courses all lead to a final examination, and a certificate for successful candidates. AVU courses may be conducted at business organisations if specially booked and paid for by such organisations.

In 2002, a total of 49 000 course participants were enrolled in AVU courses. As AVU study is normally part-time, the number of full-time equivalents was only close to 13 000 in 2002. Following a stable period in the 1990s, participation has been declining since 2000⁸.

⁷ *Act on general adult education and on adult education centres, Section 1*

⁸ *EVA 2005: Evaluation of adult education centres, ps. 15-16*

The table below shows the number of full-time equivalent students in the entire adult education system in Denmark (“Total”), and in selected programmes for adults with basic skill needs. Please note that reading courses for adults were replaced by FVU-Reading in 2001.

Table 2
Student full-time equivalents in public sector adult education, total and in programmes for adults with basic skill needs, 1994-2002

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
AVU 1)	14 006	14 745	15 595	14 256	14 570	15 920	16 254	12 984	12 984
Danish for immigrant learners 2)	12 996	13 647	16 214	16 141	16 464	17 223	19 225	19 641	20 429
Special education for adults 3)	-	1 153	1 182	1 197	1 738	1 282	1 282	1 282	1 282
Reading courses for adults	-	-	292	460	511	531	453	168	-
FVU (Reading and Mathematics) 4)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	684	777
Total	91 362	104 553	110 689	113 638	128 695	113 344	102 250	99 724	94 773

1) The 2001 figures are for the school year 2000/01; the 2000 figure is for the school year 1999/00, etc. There are no figures as yet for 2002, due to which the 2001 figure is used as a guideline. 2) There are 756 hours in one student full-time equivalent. 3) No reports have been made since 1999, so the 1999 figure is used as a guideline for the more recent years. 4) Based on Amtsrådsforeningens student figures (825 course hours per student full-time equivalent). Excluding the day folk high schools' own FVU activity under the day folk high school Act (possible until 1/1-2003). Source: Ministry of Education: Facts and figures 2005, p.75.

	FVU	AVU	Danish for adult foreigners	Special education for adults
Aim	Strengthening basic skills in reading and mathematics.	Improving and supplementing general skills.	Contributing to providing immigrant learners with Danish language skills and qualifications and knowledge about culture and social conditions in Denmark.	To ensure that after compulsory education, individuals with physical or mental handicaps may get access to tuition and social assistance to alleviate or limit the effect of such handicaps.
Level	Basic school – approx. 3rd – 9th grade.	The leaving examination of the Folkeskole.	Different levels depending on the educational level in the country of origin.	
Target group	Adults aged 18 and above.	Adults aged 18 and above.	Foreigners with a residence permit or with permission to stay in Denmark without a residence permit. Participation is conditional upon the individual having acquired a Danish civil registry number.	Adults with physical and mental handicaps. To participate, applicants must have passed the age of compulsory education.
Contents	Reading, spelling and written composition. Mathematics and basic mathematical concepts.	Core subjects: Danish, mathematics, English, German, French, social studies and science subjects. Non-compulsory subjects: visual arts, Danish as second language, IT, philosophy, history, Latin, media studies, psychology, co-operation and communication etc.	Basic Danish language programmes for foreigners without sufficient Danish language skills. There are three Danish language programmes (1, 2 and 3) aimed at different groups of participants depending on prior education and qualifications. Each of the three programmes is divided into six modules.	Must be adapted to the qualifications, skills and needs of the individual.
Duration and structure	Between 40 and 80 lessons per level. Each level may be completed in the course of a varying number of weeks.	60-240 lessons per level. A course may consist of one or two levels. Courses may take six months or one year and may be flexible or organised as distance learning.	The three Danish language programmes each correspond to 1.2 years' full time education. Danish Language programme 3, module 6 is concluded by the examination in Danish as a second language (Studieprøven). Danish Language programme 3, module 5 is concluded by Danish Test 3 (Prøve i Dansk 3).	The Act provides the general guidelines but makes no specific provisions for the scope and content of courses.
Final exams, diploma and credit transfer	A state recognised diploma is issued. The programme does not provide formal access to further education or jobs.	The courses lead up to a state-controlled exam. A diploma is issued. Exams usually involve the same right to continuing education as the final exams the Folkeskole.	Certificate of Danish Test 3 gives access to further education in combination with other relevant qualifying exam etc. For the purpose of enrolment in AVU, EUD and most other upper-secondary programmes, Danish Test 2 is guiding admission requirement for the training programme for social and health assistant and adult vocational training. Danish Test 2 provides the required documentation of Danish language proficiency for persons applying for Danish citizenship.	

Source: Tripartite committee 2006, part 2, p. 94 + 101

3.2 Danish reading and writing at adult basic skills level

Adult basic skills education is defined partly in terms of level (i.e. the level of the final exams of the Danish Folkeskole), and partly in academic terms, for two key subject areas, i.e. Danish language and reading and writing on the one hand, and mathematics on the other.

There are five different programmes aimed at adults over the age of 18 who need to improve their basic skills in Danish reading and writing⁹:

- Preparatory adult education in reading (FVU Reading)
- Danish at general adult education level (AVU)
- Danish for adult immigrants
- Danish as a second language at general adult education level (AVU)
- Courses for dyslexics

The five programmes are complementary. Even though the educational levels are different, they overlap to some extent. “Danish for immigrant learners” is organised under the Ministry of Integration. The other programmes are organised under the Ministry of Education.

3.2.1 FVU Reading¹⁰

The aim of FVU Reading is to provide adults with the opportunity to improve and supplement their basic skills in reading, spelling and written composition, partly with a view to further education, partly to strengthen their qualifications for active participation in all aspects of the life of the community.

The programme is divided into four levels leading to the same level as AVU level 1. Each of the four levels consists of 40-60 lessons (one lesson is 45 minutes). The providers of FVU decide whether FVU Reading is the right programme for the applicant and at what level he or she may be enrolled. As a rule, such assessment is made on the basis of an interview with the applicant, and is supplemented by a test if necessary.

In 2004, a total of 19 238 participated in FVU Reading¹¹. From 2002 to 2003 the activity level for FVU Reading increased by 27.6% and by 18.1% from 2003 to 2004.

3.2.2 Danish at general adult education level (AVU)

The programme is open to all adults who speak and understand Danish. The aim of Danish at AVU is to ensure that by working with reading, listening, speaking and writing, all the participants will acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for communication, expression and perception. Most often the teaching takes place at an adult education centre (VUC), but it may also take place at business enterprises.

It is possible to enter the programme at two levels: Danish 1, whose finishing level corresponds to the ninth grade, and Danish 2, corresponding to the finishing level of the 10th grade.

⁹ <http://us.uvm.dk/voksen/danskoglasningtilvoksne/index.htm?menuid=350525>

¹⁰ <http://us.uvm.dk/voksen/danskoglasningtilvoksne/fvulasning.htm?menuid=350525>, Act on preparatory adult education the (FVU Act), no. 487 of 31.05.2000 with later amendments and the Ministerial Order on FVU of 15.12.2000 with later amendments

¹¹ EVA: FVU Annual Report 2004, p. 8

Danish 1 is one integrated course and the recommended number of lessons is 120 (one lesson lasts 50 minutes). It may be organised either as a brief and concentrated course, or as a course of longer duration, spread over a year, for example.

The course is based on the participants' academic skills and level. Participants work with reading, writing, speaking and listening in context. The Ministry Order on AVU establishes concrete targets for the learning of language and texts within a number of literary and non-literary genres.

3.2.3 Danish for Immigrant Learners¹²

Foreigners 18 years and older with a residence permit and a civil registry number are entitled to register for the programme providing non-native speakers with the Danish language skills needed to manage a job, complete an education and to function as citizens in Denmark. Danish for immigrant learners is specifically targeted to adults of non-Danish origin and does not require any particular knowledge of Danish prior to enrolment in the programme. The programme teaches basic Danish in terms of understanding, speaking, reading and writing Danish. However, an equally prominent aim is to provide the participants with knowledge of culture and society.

The programmes are free for immigrant learners who are covered by the provisions of the Integration Act and for other foreigners who are not self-supporting. In pursuance of the rules of the Integration Act, foreigners who are offered an introductory programme are entitled to three years of introductory integration support. The local authorities may charge fees for self-supporting participants and for individuals who are not covered by the Integration Act, cf. section 15 of the Ministerial Order on Danish Education for Immigrant Learners

The programme may be provided by municipal language centres, other public educational institutions or educational institutions approved by the public authorities, private language centres and other private providers, whenever the programme is offered to immigrants as part of an activity or employment in a private or public enterprise. Teaching is flexible; it can be organised for groups or individuals.

The programme comprises education in Danish for a period of up to three years at three levels: Danish 1, 2, and 3 for learners of Danish as a second language. The three Danish programmes are divided into six modules and may be completed by a test set by the central authorities:

- Danish 1 leads up to Danish Test 1. The oral part of the test is at the level of the Council of Europe's level B1 and the written part of the test is at the level of the Council of Europe's level A1.
- Danish 2 leads up to Danish Test 2. The oral part of the test is between the levels of the Council of Europe's level B1 and B2 and the written part of the test is at the level of the Council of Europe's level B1.
- Danish 3, module 5 leads up to Danish Test 3. The oral and written parts of the test are at the level of the Council of Europe's level B2.

¹² http://us.uvm.dk/voksen/danskoglasningtilvoksne/dansk_udlandinge.htm?menuid=350525

- Danish 3, module 6 leads up to *Studieprøven i Dansk som andetsprog* (the official exam in Danish as a second language). The oral and written parts of this test are at the level of the Council of Europe's level C1.

3.2.4 Danish as second language in general adult education (AVU)¹³

All adults of non-Danish origin over the age of 18 who speak and understand Danish at the level of the finishing module of Danish 3 are entitled to enrol. Danish as a second language at AVU most often takes place at an adult education centre (VUC) but may also take place at a business enterprise. Danish as a second language at AVU is targeted to adults who wish to improve their Danish reading, listening, speaking and writing skills.

The aim of Danish as a second language at AVU is to enable adults of non-Danish origin to increase their knowledge and understanding of Danish language as well as culture. The programme is intended to increase the individual participant's knowledge and skills in understanding and use the language as a means of communication, expression and perception in an active social and working life. Danish as a second language is offered as one, integrated course and the recommended number of lessons is 240. It may be organised either as a brief and concentrated course or as a course of longer duration, spread over a year, for example.

The teaching is based on the participants' academic background and needs and is organised in such a manner that the participants continually work with reading, writing, speaking and listening. The work with the language and the texts from various literary and non-literary genres is related to the cultural context of which such texts are part.

3.2.5 Courses for dyslexics¹⁴

Courses for dyslexics are provided under the Act on special education for adults. Special education for adults is aimed at alleviating or limiting the effect of physical or mental handicaps through compensatory measures, and teaching of dyslexics is targeted to adults with specific problems in reading and writing.

The teaching is based on an academic assessment/visitation, upon which a decision is taken on the likelihood of improving the individual's scope of action and functional skills through teaching and guidance. Thus, the aim and contents of teaching is based on the qualifications, skills and needs of the individual.

Teaching is typically one-to-one or in small groups. Courses and course materials are free for the participant. Courses are primarily provided by the individual county's own institutions – adult special education centres or communication centres – or contracted out to adult education associations and private organisers.

¹³ http://us.uvm.dk/voksen/danskoglasningtilvoksne/dansksomandetsprog_AVU.htm?menuid=350525

¹⁴ <http://us.uvm.dk/voksen/danskoglasningtilvoksne/ordblinde.htm?menuid=350525> and EVA 2003: "Evaluation of special education for adults"

3.3 Mathematics at adult basic skills level

3.3.1 FVU Mathematics¹⁵

As for FVU Reading, the programmes are aimed at the individual needs of adult participants and involve the same aims in terms of further education and active participation in all aspects of the life of the community. FVU Mathematics is also primarily provided by adult education centres (VUC), adult education associations etc. and may take place at business enterprises and other places. The aim of FVU Mathematics is to provide participants with better opportunities for clarifying, improving and supplementing their functional skills within the fields of mathematics. The programme is divided into two parts and leads up to the same level as AVU level 1. Part 1 consists of 40-60 lessons and part 2 consists of 60-80 lessons. Apart from that, the rules are basically identical to those applying to FVU Reading.

In 2004, a total of 3 640 people participated in FVU Mathematics¹⁶. From 2002 to 2003 the activity level for FVU Mathematics increased by 26.9% and by 17.5% from 2003 to 2004.

3.3.2 AVU Mathematics at general adult education level¹⁷

The aim of AVU Mathematics is to ensure that the participants acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and use mathematics in private life, work and society. It is possible to enter the programme at two levels, whose final levels correspond to the ninth and tenth grade in lower secondary school.

3.4 Other programmes

3.4.1 Experiments with 'words and sums' workshops

The Ministry of Education has launched experiments with so-called "words and sums" workshops at vocational educational institutions covering the period 2005-2008. The aim of these experiments is to provide adult early school leavers with better opportunities for reaching the targets for their vocational supplementary training. This is to be done by carrying out individually adjusted supplementary teaching at workshops concerned with reading, writing and mathematics. This necessitates that the other instructors of the educational institutions must be offered guidance aimed at supporting the general aim of the experiment. EVA is responsible for the external evaluation of the experiment.

¹⁵ Act on preparatory adult education (the FVU act), no. 487 of 31.05.2000 with later amendments and the Ministerial Order on FVU of 15.12.2000 with later amendments

¹⁶ EVA: FVU Annual Report 2004, p. 8

¹⁷ Ministerial Order on teaching etc. on General Adult Education, 2005, Appendix 10

4 Profiles of instructors

According to EVA's evaluation of VUC, a very large group of instructors are over the age of 50 and it is very common for them to have been employed at the same place for at least ten years. This means that a large group of VUC instructors will be leaving the labour market in the years to come. The general impression from the VUCs was of good co-operation among instructors, even if some do not have the opportunity for more knowledge-sharing and co-operation within their subject groups, and more time for professional networking during the working day. A further obstacle to co-operation is that instructors involved in AVU work at very different times during the day and are scattered over a number of departments¹⁸.

VUC participants make very heavy demands on instructors' skills. For one thing, the group of participants is characterised by very different levels of qualifications and approaches to learning. As a result, the individual instructor must handle a range of demands and expectations as to how teaching is to be organised while at the same time ensuring that a large group of participants benefit from the teaching. VUC instructors are also dealing with a group of participants that, in many cases, have had negative experiences in prior schooling and education. The challenge is help make the programme a positive experience for the participants, and to give the academically weak individuals more chances in the educational system. When successful, this is a source of great satisfaction. Finally, the dropout rate among the participants is high, a fact which may pressurise and generally de-motivate instructors.

In spite of these challenges, the EVA evaluation report, which included visits to adult education centres, gives the impression that in general, instructors readily accept the challenges and conditions that are part of teaching at a VUC. It is clear that precisely the greatest challenge, i.e. the group of participants, is also what makes the instructors feel committed to and motivated for their work. Among the participants there are a large number of very motivated and grateful adults whom it is clearly rewarding to teach. However, it is also a basic condition for the instructors is that they lead uncertain lives where the amount of work depends on the number of enrolments in their courses.

It appears from the documentation supplied for the purpose of the evaluation that VUC participants are also very satisfied with the instructors at both higher preparatory level and at AVU level. Ninety-eight per cent of the participants actually found that the instructor in the class they were in when the questionnaire was distributed was academically/professionally competent. And 92% found that he or she is a good instructor. Eighty-four per cent found that

¹⁸ EVA: *Evaluation of VUC*, p. 36f

the instructor is good at taking the academic level of the individual into consideration and 86% agreed or agreed strongly that the instructor is good at adjusting the teaching to the wishes of the participants. However, on this point older participants were found to be more satisfied than the young ones.

Ninety-five per cent of the participants found the relationships among participants and between participants and instructor good. And 94% said that they are not afraid to ask questions if they feel uncertain about things. The participants were also asked how they would rate the teaching they have had at VUC so far, and 43% declared themselves to be very satisfied, 54% declared themselves to be satisfied, whereas only 3% were dissatisfied. A survey of VUC graduates shows the same trend: 95% have been satisfied or very satisfied with the teaching they have had¹⁹.

¹⁹ EVA: *Evaluation of VUC*, p. 38

5 Gaps in provision and take-up

Conclusions of the tripartite committee on adult education are described here, with special emphasis on weaknesses in the educational programmes aimed at adults with weak qualifications in reading, mathematics etc. The tripartite committee rates it as a strength that Denmark is the country that is most successful at bringing unskilled and poor readers and spellers into adult education and supplementary training and education (VEU)²⁰. However, a number of weaknesses of the present system in Denmark are listed²¹:

- The most vulnerable groups participate less in VEU than other groups.
- Persons in the group of the most vulnerable are the least motivated for participating in VEU, in spite of recognition of the importance of VEU. The greatest concentration of vulnerable persons is found in the segment where basic school is the highest educational level. This group accounts for some 27% of the work force.
- It is estimated that around 150,000 working age people currently have markedly insufficient basic skills, and the skill gap will be even greater in the future. Analyses also show that as much as 25% of the labour force have varying degrees of difficulty in reading, writing and/or doing sums. Such persons are found at all educational levels and within all fields, but are primarily concentrated in the group of unskilled and skilled workers.
- The provision of VEU is not sufficiently targeted at certain groups of the unskilled and people with difficulties in reading, writing and/or doing sums, and it is not sufficiently based on the groups' special qualifications and motivation for this type of education.
- Neither the public nor the private sector provides any overall system of counselling and guidance. As a consequence, it may be difficult to develop an overview of the very wide and varied provision of VEU.
- In the present system there is only very little assessment and recognition of real qualifications the individual may have acquired outside the established educational system. Such qualifications are not visible and therefore largely unmarketable in the labour market, resulting in diminished mobility. Moreover, participation in educational activities is less well targeted when learners are required to spend time learning what they know already, which may also result in diminished motivation.
- Half the private enterprises and approximately a seventh of public enterprises state that they make no systematic investigation of the need for competence development. These enterprises employ approximately 17% of all employees, 20% of employees in the private sector and 7% of employees in the public sector. For the enterprises that do state that they systematically investigate needs, there is no available information about the number of

²⁰ *Tripartite committee 2006, p.18*

²¹ *Tripartite committee 2006, p.19*

employees reached. Unskilled workers are less likely to have their educational needs assessed than other groups.

- The analyses of the committee show that the managers and particularly immediate supervisors greatly value individual employee's participation in VEU. Lack of managerial focus may therefore weaken motivation and participation, especially for the groups that are the least motivated to participate in educational activities.

The evaluation on FVU, conducted by EVA in 2004-2005, concluded that the entire volume of the FVU activity had not yet reached the level expected by the legislators when they launched the act in 2000, particularly with respect to mathematics²².

²² EVA: 2005 "Evaluation of Preparatory Adult Education", p. 18

6 Assessment policies and structures

6.1 FVU

Coursework at each of the four levels of FVU Reading and the two levels of FVU Mathematics may be completed with a voluntary written test to be assessed as passed or not passed. Since May 2004, a flexible testing system has been in operation, in which the tests are conducted in accordance with the needs of the providers and the participants. The test does not provide access to other programmes but gives the participant the possibility of testing his or her skills. The same test is used all over the country simultaneously, and leads to a certificate if passed. Participants who have participated in 85% of the lessons may also choose to receive a certificate of participation.

From EVA's evaluation of FVU it appears that several providers find that completing various levels with a test has a motivating effect on participants. EVA's evaluation also leads to the conclusion that the present flexible testing system is a step forward because it creates greater cohesion between the specific teaching and the possibility for taking a test in the subject. The fact that tests are taken at the end of a course means that the participants see the test as a natural component of the course. At the same time, the flexible testing system makes allowances for participants that are attached to the labour market in the sense that tests may be taken outside of working hours. Nevertheless, in 2003 only 39% chose to take a test.

As regards formative assessment, the Ministerial Order on FVU (§8) points out that instructors and participants must continually evaluate and assess the form, content and organisation of the teaching as well as the learning processes of the participants.

Continuing evaluation at FVU Reading²³

Continuing evaluation of the participants' benefits from the teaching

The nature and degree of adult difficulties with written language, the individual adult's experience of written language, the need to read and write during the working day, encouragement and support from the home environment and the adult's personal goals and motivation for participating are all factors that influence the extent to which a person will benefit from teaching. Therefore, it is vital that the aim, form and content of the teaching are continually evaluated by the instructor and the participant. The aim of continuing evaluation is to increase the participant's knowledge of his/her own writing skills and to render visible the connection between the contents of the courses and the development and educational benefits of the individual in terms of writing skills. The instructor and the individual should, on a continuing basis, discuss the participant's assimilation of reading, spelling and writing skills and development of appropriate strategies for handling everyday demands of written language. It is important that in his/her planning, the instructor makes allowance for emerging educational needs such as current topics. The continuing evaluation of the content and form of the teaching must also ensure that the instructor will discover and exploit knowledge about the special needs of the individual by adjusting educational elements and materials if need be. For the purpose of supporting the instructor in this work, the Ministry of Education has launched the development of a tool for the purpose of internal evaluation of FVU in reading, spelling and written composition.

Centrally set tests to finish each level at FVU²⁴

A centrally set test after each level

FVU teaching of reading, spelling and written composition is preparatory to a test. There is no specific syllabus that the individual participant must have assimilated, but the targets of the courses are fixed on the basis of the participant profiles described for each level. The centrally set tests at the end of each level serve the purpose of demonstrating whether the participant has developed his skills and strategies within the fields of written language of importance to functional reading and writing in an everyday context. The participant may choose to register for the centrally set test after following a course at a specific FVU level. If the participant does not sit for the centrally set test but still wishes to continue to the next level of the preparative adult course in reading, spelling and written composition, the head of the institution must guarantee that the participant actually possesses the writing skills and strategies required to continue at the FVU level in questions.

²³ Extract from programme guidelines for FVU-reading

²⁴ Extract from programme guidelines for FVU-reading

6.2 AVU

The Ministerial Order on AVU contains a provision dissimilar to the Order on FVU: According to the Ministerial Order on FVU, it is an obligation for instructors and participants to continuously evaluate the teaching and learning processes of the participants. On the other hand, it appears clearly in the Ministerial Order on AVU (§5) that the teaching of the different core subjects leads to a final written and oral test in accordance with specific guidelines.

Learners receive a grade for both written and oral performance. The test provides access to education at the level immediately following level 1, and a certificate is issued. If the participant has been active for 85% of the time but has no wish to take the test, a certificate of attendance may be issued. Danish as a second language is finished with a test corresponding to the leaving exam of the Folkeskole or the level for Danish 1 at AVU (ninth grade).

It appears from EVA's evaluation of VUC that almost all the instructors in the evaluation group consulted found it important for the participants to take the tests²⁵. The reasons given were that the participants frequently needed the certificate afterwards; that the fact of working towards the goal of taking the tests would provide the participants with a greater overview of the material; and that the participants may achieve a personal victory from passing a test. The survey of graduates that was part of the documentation on which the evaluation was based showed that 58% of the AVU graduates had taken tests in one or more subjects, and that AVU graduates with only primary and lower secondary education had taken tests in more subjects than the other participants.

6.3 Danish for immigrant learners

The participant takes a test before moving up from one module to the next and for placement purposes. The local authorities issue a certificate for the completed test. Furthermore, the local authorities issue a certificate of active attendance to participants covered by the Integration Act who have failed to pass the final test. As a main rule, this certificate is only issued to participants who have participated in 85% of the course.

²⁵ EVA: *Evaluation of VUC*, p.101-102

7 Formative assessment

In the 2005 OECD report, *Formative Assessment: Improving Learning in Secondary Classrooms*, formative assessment is defined as “frequent, interactive assessment of student progress and understanding to identify learning needs and adjust teaching appropriately”. The following provides an overview of the work that is being done with special emphasis on continuing evaluation of teaching and learning within adult basic skills education in Denmark. It is an incomplete picture, based, out of necessity, on diverse sources that independently only illustrate individual features of formative assessment.

7.1 Continuing evaluation in upper secondary education

In 2004 EVA²⁶ carried out an interview-based survey which aimed at describing the various points of view among teachers and school managers on continuing evaluation of how pupils benefit from the teaching in upper secondary education²⁷. Although the survey concerned teaching of young people, the identified points of view are likely also widely found among instructors within the field of adult basic skills education.

According to one view of the continuing evaluation, it is the teacher’s constant attention to the pupils and ongoing dialogue that are considered beneficial, even without explicit verbalisation. Another view sees the continuing evaluation as a type of pedagogical methodology or mindset with which the teacher approaches his or her teaching. This view is similar to the aforementioned view, in that it does not see evaluation as a separate activity, cut off from the teaching itself. Yet in contrast to the first approach, this view involves some degree of systematization and is based on documentation in the form of logbooks or portfolios etc. A third view perceives the continuing evaluation as something that is separate from the teaching, for instance in the form of pupil interviews focusing on assessment.

A survey of 1 800 teachers in the three-year upper secondary programmes (i.e. general upper secondary school and technical and vocational upper secondary school) showed that the most teachers do not see continuing evaluation as something that is separate from day-to-day teaching activities or as something that involved any specific systematic approach.

²⁶ *The Danish Evaluation Institute's (EVA) primary task is to initiate and conduct evaluations of education - from primary school and youth education to higher education and adult and post-graduate education. The evaluations cover public educational establishments and private institutions in receipt of state subsidy. EVA is the national centre of knowledge for educational evaluation and part of its duty is to compile, produce and communicate national as well as international experiences in the field of educational evaluation.*

²⁷ EVA: “Continuing evaluation of the pupils benefits from upper secondary education”, 2004, p.17

7.2 Continuing evaluation of reading skills in primary and lower secondary school

In EVA's evaluation "Reading in primary and lower secondary school (the Folkeskole)" from 2004, continuing evaluation is seen as an integral part of teaching. It is stated that at class level pupil interviews are the most extensively used form of assessment for the purpose of acquiring knowledge of how the pupils benefit from the teaching. In general, oral approaches are most widely used, and it is very much up to the individual teacher whether planning and benefits from the interviews should be recorded in writing. At a few schools, although the number is increasing, forms of assessment such as use of portfolios and logbooks are also employed. In conclusion, the evaluation report points out that continuing evaluation is one of the most important processes to develop knowledge used in schools. Even if continuing evaluation is the responsibility of the individual teacher, it is nevertheless important that the management makes demands as well as provides support in order to create a common basis to carry out and follow up on the continuing evaluation. Like continuing evaluation, tests are used as pedagogical tools to develop teaching, but the evaluation group points out that there is a need to clarify how the various sources of knowledge interact to ensure that knowledge about the pupils is both documented and nuanced.

7.3 Continuing evaluation at VUC

In its evaluation report on VUC from 2005, EVA concludes that the VUCs make no systematic evaluation of user satisfaction²⁸. However, there are various mechanisms for feedback. For instance, in a self-evaluation report, one VUC writes that they get a form of feedback from participants when they drop out of a course and are required to state their reasons to the student administration office. At several VUCs the teaching is evaluated orally twice during a course, at the end of which a written evaluation is requested of participants, with their feedback on the programme or course. These results are used when new programmes are developed. Furthermore, based on meetings with instructors, the evaluation report concludes that there are very great differences between the individual teachers. Some carry out assessment on a continuing basis, whereas others never make any assessment.

A part of the documentation basis for the evaluation was a survey in which VUC graduates were asked whether they had been invited to participate in evaluation of the teaching while they had attended VUC. The specific question was: "Have you been asked your opinion of the teaching in the form of a questionnaire, a class discussion, a theme session or the like?" To this, 19% of AVU participants answered that they had participated in an evaluation of all their courses; 21% answered that they had participated in the evaluation of some courses; and 60% answered that they had not participated in any evaluation at all. Of those who had participated in evaluations, 43% of AVU participants found that evaluations never lead to any change. Thirty-eight per cent of AVU participants found that changes did happen "sometimes", whereas 19% found that changes took place "mostly" or "always".

²⁸ EVA: *Evaluation of VUC*, p. 95-96

7.4 The adult education environment at FVU

EVA has made no systematic survey of the use of formative assessment at FVU, but some of the factors of importance for formative assessment have been described.

EVA's evaluation of FVU concluded that, generally, there is a good adult education environment at FVU where the participants feel safe. Thus, in a questionnaire, 94% of participants answered that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "You were not afraid to ask questions even if you were uncertain about things". In compliance with the programme guidelines, several providers of FVU confirmed that it is possible to include materials from the participants' everyday lives, including texts that may be linked to their jobs and training. This should be compared with the fact that a survey among participants showed that 88% of the participants were satisfied or very satisfied with the books and other materials used. All in all the evaluation group found that the providers of FVU are generally very conscious of the importance of having an adult education environment that relies heavily on the everyday experience of the participants, and where teaching materials that make sense to the participants are used.

An adult education environment where the participants dare ask questions about things they are uncertain of or do not understand is a good basis for dialogue in the classroom and is of great importance in the possibilities of practicing formative assessment.

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9 Abbreviations

AVU	General adult education
EUD	Vocational education for young people
FVU	Preparatory adult education
GSK	Supplementary examination courses at upper secondary level
VEU	Adult and supplementary training and education
VUC	Adult education centre
EVA	The Danish Evaluation Institute